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Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750

Lorraine J. Daston, Katharine Park

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Winner of the History of Science Society's Pfizer Prize"This book is about setting the limits of the natural and the limits of the known, wonders and wonder, from the High Middle Ages through the Enlightenment. A history of wonders as objects of natural inquiry is simultaneously an intellectual history of the orders of nature. A history of wonder as a passion of natural inquiry is simultaneously a history of the evolving collective sensibility of naturalists. Pursued in tandem, these interwoven histories show how the two sides of knowledge, objective order and subjective sensibility, were obverse and reverse of the same coin rather than opposed to one another."-- From the IntroductionWonders and the Order of Nature is about the ways in which European naturalists from the High Middle Ages through the Enlightenment used wonder and wonders, the passion and its objects, to envision themselves and the natural world. Monsters, gems that shone in the dark, petrifying springs, celestial apparitions--these were the marvels that adorned romances, puzzled philosophers, lured collectors, and frightened the devout. Drawing on the histories of art, science, philosophy, and literature, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park explore and explain how wonder and wonders fortified princely power, rewove the texture of scientific experience, and shaped the sensibility of intellectuals. This is a history of the passions of inquiry, of how wonder sometimes inflamed, sometimes dampened curiosity about nature's best-kept secrets. Refracted through the prism of wonders, the order of nature splinters into a spectrum of orders, a tour of possible worlds.

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